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EDUCATION'S MOST CRUCIAL ISSUE.

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SCHOOLS AND EDUCATORS MUST TAKE THE LEADERSHIP IN THE SCHOOL DESEGREGATION PROCESS. SEGREGATED CLASSROOMS PERPETUATE IN THE NEGRO CHILD A FEELING OF SECOND-CLASS CITIZENSHIP, WHICH IS BOTH UNFAIR AND ILLEGAL. SOUTHERNERS AND SOME NORTHERNERS CONTEND, HOWEVER, THAT "DISCRIMINATION" AND "SEGREGATION" ARE NOT SYNONYMOUS AND THEREFORE DUAL SCHOOL SYSTEMS ARE PERMISSIBLE. IN THE NORTH SUCH FACTORS AS FEEDER PATTERNS, ZONING, AND FACULTY ASSIGNMENTS CONTRIBUTE TO DE FACTO SCHOOL SEGREGATION. LEGAL REMEDIES ARE DIFFICULT OR IMPOSSIBLE TO APPLY BECAUSE INTENT TO DISCRIMINATE MUST FIRST BE ESTABLISHED. FEDERAL PROGRAMS ARE CONTRIBUTING TO THE EDUCATIONAL QUALITY OF GHETTO AND IMPOVERISHED RURAL SCHOOLS, BUT UNTIL URBAN DE FACTO SEGREGATION CAN BE ATTACKED LEGALLY, LOCAL EFFORTS ARE NEEDED TO BRING EDUCATIONAL EXCELLENCE TO EXISTING SEGREGATED SCHOOLS. IN PARTICULAR, THE SCHOOLS MIGHT REVISE DISCRIMINATORY PERSONNEL ASSIGNMENT POLICIES, INTRODUCE SOCIALLY RELEVANT CURRICULUMS AND PROGRAMS WHICH RAISE PUPILS' PERFORMANCE, AND ENCOURAGE FUTURE TEACHERS TO STUDENT TEACH IN SLUM SCHOOLS. THIS PAPER WAS PRESENTED BEFORE THE FOUNDERS' DAY CONVOCATION, TEACHERS COLLEGE, COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY, NEW YORK CITY, MAY 3, 1966. (NH)

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
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EDUCATION'S MOST CRUCIAL ISSUE*

An Address by Harold Howe II
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During the past several weeks members of my staff and I have been meeting with groups of school officials and political leaders from most of the southern States.

Against a backdrop of considerable press attention -- some factual, some darkly speculative -- delegations have come to my office in Washington. We in turn have traveled to the South.

While we encountered a spark or two of fire in the eyes of some of the southern representatives, the conversations were sincere and wholly useful. It was vital that they be so, for we were discussing what I conceive to be the most critical issue facing American education during the latter part of the Twentieth Century. I speak of the necessity for eliminating segregation from our schools.

In these particular discussions we focused on the segregation that has by official State policy characterized southern education for the past century and continues to characterize it in large measure even though State laws have changed under Federal pressures. But the basic issues involved in racial discrimination in the schools are by no means confined to the South. The effort to eliminate segregated classrooms will stir increasingly intense debate in every section of this country. The decisions we cannot avoid making will test both the patience and the conscience of every citizen.

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*Before the Founders' Day Convocation, Teachers College, Columbia University, New York City, May 3, 1966.

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Our achievements and failures alike will have a significant impact on the national economy, on the quality of country ours will be, and on the individual lives of millions of people here in the United States and in foreign countries as well.

As President Johnson said last Thursday in his message to Congress urging new Civil Rights legislation:

> We are engaged in a great adventure -- as great as that of the last century, when our fathers marched to the Western frontier. Our frontier today is of human beings, not of land. If we are able to open that frontier, to free each child to become the best that is in him to become, our reward -- both spiritual and material -- will exceed any that we gained a century ago through territorial expansion.

Those of us professionally connected with education thus have a heavy responsibility to our students and to our fellow men. That responsibility is of course not ours alone. Eliminating segregation, in the schools no less than in other institutions, will require close collaboration among every element in the community. Government agencies at the local, State, and Federal levels must play their part; and so must city planners, real estate people, architects, civic and political leaders, community groups, and many others.

The call to action must come, however, from within the school itself, and it must come from those of us charged with the conduct of education. The school is where the children of the next generation now are. We cannot

allow them to grow up with a cast of mind which perpetuates prejudice and which forces our Nation into another two or three decades of living with the lie that racially separate education can be equal.

Beyond its implications for the professional educator, I do not think it too much to say that continued existence of segregated schools -- de jure and de facto alike -- would undermine and in time destroy this Nation's spirit and vitality. Our citizens have always taken pride in their schools, regarding them as characteristically American. It would be a calloused ego indeed that would remain untouched in face of the fact that an enterprise regarded as characteristically American was in practice unfair.

And unfair is the best that can be said about the situation confronting the Negro child in the segregated classroom. Every experience he has seems calculated to demonstrate to him that he is inferior and should resign himself to being so. The system singles him out, separating him by color from the best schools and the best teachers. The least is demanded of him and expected from him. The prescribed neighborhood he lives in, and the restrictions that shackle the adults he lives with, strongly suggest that his is a lost cause. His life at school combines with the rest of his life to make him see himself as a second-class citizen.

Great though our country's riches are, we cannot afford this waste of human lives. Nor can we lightly disregard its effect on the position of the United States in the family of Nations. Since World War II, the United States has taken the lead in the pursuit of peace and human rights. We seek to advance freedom and to relieve oppression on all fronts -- in a world made up of people some two-thirds of whom are not white. When these people look at the conditions among nonwhite Americans, they have little interest in the lengthy historical explanation of how second-class

citizenship for Negro Americans has come about. More likely they will conclude, to paraphrase Emerson, "What you are speaks so loudly, I cannot hear what you say." And we must therefore ask ourselves how long we can expect world leadership to be accepted from a Nation that either cannot or will not put its own house in order.

It is necessary that we comprehend these issues. It is necessary to understand that American education -- education offered equally and openly to all, not just to the privileged -- is on trial. It is necessary to understand that segregated classrooms are not entirely accidental; it is not wholly by chance that our largest cities are marked by predominantly white and predominantly Negro schools and that this separation of the races is on the increase in our city schools. And whatever decisions we make about maintaining or eliminating these arrangements, it is necessary also to recognize that segregated schools -- in the North every bit as much as in the South -- violate not only the most revered principles of this Nation but our fundamental law.

That position -- particularly as set forth in the Office of Education's Revised Statement of Policies for School Desegregation Plans -- has been warmly challenged. Some southern leaders, and they are not without counterparts in the North, contend that our requirements are not only unfair but illegal. By what right, many of them seem to be saying, does the Office of Education interpret "discrimination" (the word used in Title VI of the Civil Rights Act) as being synonymous with "segregation?" Why isn't it legal and just to have segregated schools as long as they are created by the choices of pupils and parents or by the patterns of residence which emerge in portions of a school district?

And thus suddenly the calendar is turned back to 1954 and the Supreme Court's decision in the case of Brown vs. The Board of Education of Topeka. In its opinion the Court enunciated "the fundamental principle that racial discrimination in public education is unconstitutional," and the Court went on to say that "All provisions of Federal, State, or local law requiring or permitting such discrimination must yield to this principle." The decision ended, you may recall, with these words: "We conclude that in the field of public education the doctrine of 'separate but equal' has no place. Separate educational facilties are inherently unequal."

Fortified by these unequivocal statements -- and a host of subsequent District Court decisions spelling out the position in detail -- those of us in the Office of Education are on firm legal ground when we move against the principle of the dual school system in the South, with its tradition of "separate but (theoretically) equal" schools and its segregated faculties. These arrangements were originally established by State and local laws, by formal public policy. The segregation resulting from them is clearly illegal under the Civil Rights Act and under Federal court decisions.

But to the North lie quicksands of legal interpretation. No major Northern city has had -- in recent decades, at least -- a law or a public policy officially setting up separate schools for whites and Negroes. Segregation in the Northern schools has instead come about for a wide variety of reasons connected primarily with patterns of residence -- from real estate convenants, for example, or from the flight of well-heeled families to the suburbs; and most of all, perhaps, from the subtle, insidious, undocumented influence of prejudice which herds the Negro into the city

ghetto through economic and social pressures which have no standing in law but which operate as effectively as legal segregation ever did in the South.

The consequence is a clearly discernible pattern of predominantly white and predominantly Negro urban schools that have developed without any clearly official planning or policy; and the further consequence is unequal educational opportunity through segregation in many ways more complete and severe than that existing in many small Southern towns. But this segregation -- Northern style -- is beyond the clear purview of the Civil Rights Act, and outside the compass of other clearly established legal remedies as of this time.

We face a similarly imponderable situation even when we get into the realm of official action taken by a school system. There is, for example, the feeder pattern: by which children in elementary schools A, B, C, and D are assigned to East junior high school; while those in schools W, X, Y, and Z are assigned to West junior high. The Office of Education has received complaints from several cities that these assignments have a peculiar way of making East junior high all white and West junior high all Negro. But is this what school officials actually intended or is it just a coincidence? Unless intent can be established, it is difficult for the law to reach the problem.

We have received similar complaints about attendance zone boundaries and about faculty assignments. It would be difficult not to suspect that some of the crazy-quilt attendance zones to be found are the result of deliberate gerrymandering to produce white or Negro schools, or that

predominantly Negro faculties in Negro schools are there by something other than coincidence. But how does one penetrate the hearts and minds of those who drew those boundary lines or assigned those teachers? How does one legally establish their intent?

Office of Education teams have spent many weeks in several northern school districts trying to find the answers -- trying to determine how we can successfully proceed. But we are not satisfied with our progress, and it is clear that the end to segregation in the northern schools will not come soon. What is more, we face the danger that in the South, patterns of de facto segregation will develop as the old dual school system disappears and as more fortunate white families flee to the suburbs of growing cities to avoid integrated schools.

The fact is that although a great deal is being accomplished under the Civil Rights Act, this law is not an ideal instrument for changing de facto school segregation through enforcement.

Its imperfections were recently brought to the attention of Congress through two bills -- one introduced by Senator Edward Kennedy, the other by Congressman Adam Clayton Powell. Both bills are aimed directly at the problem of segregation in the big cities. Both provide greatly increased financial assistance to school districts that wish to undertake programs to alleviate their problems. One of the bills would apply sanctions against districts that remain segregated.

Whatever the fate of these proposals, programs enacted into law by Congress during the past few years are proving their usefulness in helping to make equal educational opportunity a reality for every child. Under Title IV of the Civil Rights Act, for example, hundreds of teachers are

receiving special training -- at institutes, financed by Title IV -- in how to deal with the problems of integration effectively and smoothly. As experience has demonstrated, desegregation means a great deal more than simply eliminating separate schools. There are deep educational and psychological needs to be met, and teachers dealing with newly-integrated classrooms must know how to meet them. One doesn't hear much about Title IV of the Civil Rights Act, but it seems to me a particularly valuable and important teacher-training enterprise. I wish it were larger and more widely used.

A considerably broader program is at work today in every State and nearly every community across the Nation under Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965. This Title, you may recall, supports a billion-dollar-a-year drive to bring an array of special new educational programs to the children of poverty -- the children (a large proportion of them Negro, of course) whose home and school deprivations are most poignantly acute. The program is working, too, on the minds of school administrators across the Nation. It is showing them that poverty is a problem in education and that education is the best way to destroy poverty. And perhaps it is causing some of them to speculate that sentencing Negroes to poverty may result as much as anything else from white people's attitudes.

Closely allied in spirit with Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act is a very special program we are just now trying to get off the ground -- the National Teacher Corps. Carefully selected teams of teacher-interns, led by experienced career-teachers, will -- at the invitation of local school systems -- take their dedication and

talent and spirit into classrooms in city slums and poverty-stricken rural areas. It would be difficult to think of a more challenging or more rewarding or more necessary undertaking. I would hope that the alumni of Teachers College would be well represented among the National Teacher Corps volunteers.

All in all, there are about 100 major programs carried out by the Office of Education. Every one of them, at every level of training, has an important contribution to make to the quality of American education and to making education equally available to every citizen, without regard to race or circumstance.

At the same time, local efforts of a variety of kinds are also whittling away at the issue of de facto segregation. Open enrollment programs give children and parents the opportunity to desegregate themselves; the "pairing" of schools which have traditionally been white and Negro is a device with some usefulness in the fringes of the Negro ghetto; bussing of pupils to create racial balance is highly controversial but must be conceded to be helpful in some situations; forward-looking schools in many all-white suburbs have attempted to make a contribution through student and teacher exchanges of various kinds.

But all of these laudable efforts, both Federal and local, are doomed to failure unless they are fortified by further energies directed at the basic problem.

The first priority is to make sure that the schools which serve our neediest citizens are at the very least equal to the schools that serve our most fortunate. In spite of local, State and Federal efforts, this is not now the case. Buildings are older, teachers are less

experienced and not as well trained, the turnover of staff is higher, and in many cases equipment, books and special services are less adequate in those schools where the child has special handicaps to overcome. It seems to me imperative that while we are forging legal and policy weapons to attack de facto segregation in the cities, we must at the same time take immediate steps to bring real excellence to the segregated schools which do in fact exist. The Federal Government can contribute to by programs like Title I of ESEA, and I would hope that my office can bring forward even more adventurous enterprises in the years ahead. But as we do so, we will have to be supported by local resolution to regard the problem as crucial and to bend every effort to solve it.

Here are some things which ought to happen locally:

(1) Personnel assignment policies adopted both by school systems and by teacher organizations should be adjusted to guarantee slums schools their share of experienced, able teachers and to cut down staff turnover in these schools.

(2) Building programs for the future should be planned so that new schools break up rather than continue segregation. The Office of Education will provide Federal planning funds for such efforts right now, and if I have my way about it, we will provide construction funds before long. Moreover, with the creation of the new Department of Housing and Urban Development, there is a new Federal tool to help education in the attack on de facto segregation. Planning for new land use and for housing patterns in the city must go hand in hand with planning for education.

(3) The next generation of citizens should not graduate from our high schools without having confronted -- through serious study and in depth -- the issues which confront this society in the realm of segregation and civil rights. Efforts to get this subject into the classroom must originate with States and localities, for we cannot and should not set curriculum from the Office of Education. But we can provide research funds to start responsible efforts on curriculum development, so that 18-year-olds are not entering adult life without an understanding of the stresses and problems of this society. It is about time we stopped offering an antiseptic history of our country cleaned up to please the local power structure, and it is about time also that we started talking realities with young adults who are joining the military service and entering matrimony at the age of 18.

(4) Local school districts must provide in slum schools, all of the special opportunity programs found elsewhere in the school system, so as to create both the opportunity and the expectation of performance by the children of the poor. There is a danger, well documented by Kenneth Clark in his book Dark Ghetto, that our focus on the culturally deprived will result in an assumption that poor children have less promise than others and should be given a kind of special propping up to atone for their status without giving them the advantage of the stimulation which comes from a rigorous educational program. In addition to more remedial reading and more preschool programs, we need more advanced placement in the schools of the slums.

(5) Teacher education programs must affiliate with slum schools for their practice teaching in a way to give us many more young teachers who are willing to venture "Up the Down Staircase." And most schools of education can learn from Columbia Teachers College in this respect.

These are some of the tools available to us to help make equal educational opportunity a fact of American life. But in the long run we shall overcome, not just because of laws prohibiting discrimination in the schools or educational programs to dissolve it, but because America wants us to overcome. There is a new spirit abroad in this Nation, and a refreshing new attitude. Spreading in large part from campuses such as this one, there is new determination that we cannot and will not divorce such principles as "equal justice under law" from life as we live it.

This determination inevitably focuses on where injustice is most apparent, and injustice is nowhere more apparent than in the segregated classroom. Discrimination will not be eliminated from our schools easily or soon, but the course is in my opinion inalterably set.

The changing tide is traced by the results of opinion polls entered into the record of last summer's White House Conference on Education. One of the polls involved the question, "Do you think white students and Negro students should go to the same schools?" In 1942, 40 percent of white Northerners answered, "same schools." By 1963 that figure had climbed to 73 percent. During the same period, the ratio of white Southerners saying "same schools" climbed from 2 percent in 1942 to 34 percent in 1963. Overall, in 1963, 63 percent of the

white people sampled felt that whites and Negroes should attend the same schools. As Professor Thomas F. Pettigrew, one of the Conference consultants observed, "White opinions on school desegregation have undergone extremely significant alterations throughout the country in recent years -- far greater alterations than commonly recognized."

It is high time that these alterations be reflected in official school policy. American education must catch up with American life and American law. The citizens of this Nation demand that it do so, and they look to teachers and principals and superintendents to lead the way.

As educators, there can be no doubt in our minds that segregated education is inferior education. The wisest minds in our profession have joined the Supreme Court in making that clear. What is sadly lacking is the clear public expression of these facts of our professional life. The educator must speak out and he must act. He must help parents understand that all-white and all-Negro schools harm both races. He must exercise his responsibilities for leadership, forthrightly challenging those who would deny the constitutional requirement of equal educational opportunity for all.

In the face of this most crucial issue in American education, the professional educator cannot remain silent.

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